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Book-Censorship Ruling On U.S. Units Opposed

WASHINGTON, April 24 (UPI) — Representatives of the legal and publishing sectors today urged legislation modifying or overturning a Supreme Court decision requiring prepublication censorship of books written by active and former intelligence agents.

The Supreme Court recently ruled against Frank Snepp, a former Central Intelligence Agency employee, who asserted a right to publish a book about his experiences in Vietnam without first submitting the manuscript to the agency.

Arguing against the Court's decision before the House Intelligence Oversight Committee were Theodore Jacobs, a lawyer specializing in issues of freedom of information; Robert Lewis, chairman of the freedom of information committee of Sigma Delta Chi, the society of professional journalists; and Henry Kaufman, vice president and general counsel of the Association of American Publishers Inc.

Mr. Jacobs said there was a danger that the requirement of prepublication review might be extended to other Government agencies outside the intelligence community.

Mr. Lewis, a Washington reporter, said the need to prevent intelligence officers from disclosing classified data was understandable but that the C.I.A. secrecy oaths and the Snepp decision gave the agency "an absolute power to prevent criticism of the agency by former employees."

Mr. Kaufman said that book publishers were concerned that the broad language of the Court's decision might leave the publishers open to prosecution for printing either fiction or nonfiction books by intelligence agents.